Fan Ch'i (1616-after 1694): Place-Making and the Semiotics of Sight in Seventeenth-Century Nanching

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Abstract：In his own time the Nanching-based painter Fan Ch'i (1616-after 1694) was connected with narratives of reclusion and loyalism. Later art-historical narratives linked him with the Eight Chinling Masters, where he was much overshadowed by the reputation of Kung Hsien, and with the idiom of the fantastic landscape. The present account emphasizes instead Fan Ch'i's engagement with several aspects of urban visual culture. Fan's adaptations of imagery and semiotic structures from a print-illustrated guidebook to notable Nanching sites, Chu Chih-fan's *Chin-ling t'u-yung* of 1623, is especially noteworthy. While the print images engaged in specific pictorial and textual place-making, Fan's adaptations for the most part utilized more generic structures of sites, localities, and experiences, creating small embedded narratives of urban sightseeing, reminiscence, travel, commerce, and residence. To these Fan added specific effects of visual perception, sometimes conveying qualities of Northern Sung and European visualities, but more often coded as distanced sight that could serve as a sign of historical, emotional, and possessive distance, congenial to loyalist modes of nostalgia for a lost era. In Fan's early *Landscape* handscroll of 1645, painted in the year of Nanching's surrender, multiple references to famous local sites are charged with effects of unpredictable sight to convey the experience of a landscape event: the re-making of the places of late Ming Nanching at a time of dynastic change.

Keywords: Fan Ch'I, Nanching, print illustrations, Chu Chih-fan, *Chin-ling t'u-yung*, place-making, semiotic structures urban visual culture.

The historiographic place of Fan Ch'i (1616-after 1694) and other associated professional painters of his time is on one level set by his inclusion in the loosely constructed group of *Chin-ling pa-chia*, or "Eight Masters of Chin-ling [Nanjing]," all active in the later seventeenth-century, early Ch'ing period.[1] This, like most such

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1. See Aschwin Lippe, "Kung Hsien and the Nanking School," in *Oriental Art*, n.s. II (Spring 1956),

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formulaic designations, however, was primarily a mnemonic convenience or a marketing device that avoided the deeper issues surrounding the impact of urban settings on art production.[2] These include the involved with not only social and cultural geographies of cities such as Nanching and direct representations of aspects of urban life and culture, but also the contexts of patronage, collecting, publishing, entertainment and leisure activities, sightseeing, festival practices, educational institutions, and literary culture that shaped artistic careers and production.[3]

The image of Nanching pictorial art that emerges from that kind of broader consideration is notably complex, especially looked at over the longer span of the two centuries or so from about 1500 to 1700. There are images of Nanching festivals, the urban built environment, and street life, as well as reflections of life in the pleasure and entertainment quarters.[4] The sometimes famous and artistically talented courtesans of late Ming Nanching defined a separate realm of courtesan culture.[5] A surrounding cultural and historical geography of notable sites is a major category of depiction. Religious, especially Buddhist, culture made a strong contribution to the built

21-29; n.s. IV (Winter 1958): 159-170; and Shan Kuo-ch'iang, "'Chin-ling pa-chia' kai lun," in Chao Ch'un-t'ang, ed., *Chin-ling pa-chia hua-chi* (T'ien-chin: T'ien-chin jen-min mei-shu ch'u-pan-she, 1999), unpaginated.

2. See the discussions of the terminology in William D. Y. Wu, *Kung Hsien* (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1979), pp. 161, 169, 276, n. 180; also in Hongnam Kim, *The Life of a Patron: Zhou Lianggong (1612-1672) and the Painters of Seventeenth Century China* (New York: China Institute in America, 1996), pp. 113-120, n. 360.

3. For the background to the urban geography of Nanching, see Frederick W. Mote, "The Transformation of Nanking, 1350-1400," in G. William Skinner, ed., *The Cities of Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977), pp. 101-53. See also the outline discussion of related aspects of Nanching culture in Richard Vinograd, ed., *The Southern Metropolis: Pictorial Art in 17th Century Nanjing* (exhibition catalogue, Cantor Center for Visual Art, Stanford, 2002). See also James Cahill, ed., *Shadows of Mt. Huang* (Berkeley: University Art Museum, 1981) for an exemplary exhibition-based multi-faceted and contextual study of regional artistic culture.

4. See the urban cityscape "Scenes of the Thriving Southern Capital" (*Nan-tu fan-hui t'u*), attributed to Ch'iu Ying but probably the work of a late Ming professional genre painter, reproduced in National Museum of Chinese History, ed., *A Journey Into China's Antiquity, Volume Four: Yuan Dynasty-Qing Dynasty* (Beijing: Morning Glory Publishers, 1997), cat. No. 90, pp. 92-95.

5. See Marsha Weidner et al, ed., *Views from Jade Terrace: Chinese Women Artists 1300-1912* (Indianapolis, Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1988), pp. 72-88; 95-101. Shih Shou-ch'ien, "Lang-tang chih feng – Ming-tai chung-ch'i Nan-ching de pai-miao jen-wu hua" ('The air of decadence: Mid-Ming *baimiao* style figure painting from Nanching *") Mei-shu-shih yen-chiu chi-k'an* (Journal of art historical studies) 1 (1994): 39-62;, also Kang-I Sun Chang and Haun Saussy, ed., *Women Writers of Traditional China: An Anthology of Poetry and Criticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 224-238; 320-336.

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environment and to pictorial art, including the work of resident loyalist monk-painters like K'un-ts'an (1612-after 1692) and sojourners such as Shih-t'ao (1642-1707). Nanching's complex history of settlement and relocation, its former status as a national capital and continuing role as a secondary administrative center in the late Ming, and its economic connections with surrounding regions and water-transport networks led to sojourners and occasional residents such as Chou Liang-kung (1612-1672) and Ch'eng Cheng-k'uei (1604-1676) playing important roles in patronage and collecting, while Nanching-based painters such as Kung Hsien spent considerable time in nearby Yang-chou.[6] After the fall of the Ming, the loyalist community played an important part in the art world, producing images and poems of historically resonant sites.[7] And, as a major center of publishing, Nanching participated in the dissemination of many different categories of pictorial culture: painting manuals; decorated letter-papers, illustrations of dramas and novels, illustrated encyclopedias and the like that were aimed at audiences ranging from popular to elite.[8]

The present study has a much narrower focus, on the painter Fan Ch'i and his involvement with a semiotics of place-making that figures through print illustrations and paintings in late Ming and early Ch'ing Nanching. His paintings, though mostly landscapes and flowers, were conditioned by the dynamics of an urban cultural field, where professional painting practices, patronage, and a taste for images of specific-looking places and travel all played a part. Fan Ch'i has up until now largely been situated within art-historical narratives of the fantastic and, to a lesser degree, of the impact of European pictorial devices in seventeenth-century painting.[9] Other forms of narrative play a part in the present study, including the embedded pictorial narratives in Fan Ch'i's paintings and contemporary (i.e. seventeenth-century) biographical and critical narratives. Whether historically situated or modern, narratives are viewed here as constructed in an ongoing, interconnected process.

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6. See Mote, op cit.; Kim, *The Life of a Patron*, pp. 114-116.
7. See Jerome Silbergeld, "The Political Landscapes of Kung Hsien in Painting and Poetry," *Journal of the Institute of Chinese Studies, Chinese University of Hong Kong* 8, no. 2 (December 1976): 561-573; also Jonathan Hay, "Ming Palace and Tomb in Early Qing Jiangning: Dynastic Memory and the Openness of History," *Late Imperial China*, XX/1 (June 1999): 1-48.
8. See Ma Meng-ching, Wan Ming Chin-ling "Shih-chu-chai shu-hua-p'u," Shih-chu-chai chien-p'u" yen-chiu (M.A. Thesis, National Taiwan University, 1993).
9. See James Cahill, *Fantastics and Eccentrics in Chinese Painting* (New York: Asia House Gallery, 1967), p. 63; Kim, *The Life of a Patron*, p. 119.

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Fan Ch'i and Kung Hsien

The historiography of Nanching painting, at least after the Southern T'ang, has been dominated by the early Ch'ing dynasty period so-called "Eight Chin-ling Masters" and in turn, the historiography of the early Ch'ing period has been dominated by the figure of Kung Hsien (ca. 1618-1689), and for understandable reasons. Kung Hsien was perhaps the most prolific of the Nanching-based artists, with a large surviving corpus of dramatically somber, richly textured ink landscapes. Equally or more important was Kung's extensive textual production, including inscriptions on paintings, his notes on secrets of landscape painting, some accompanying illustrated notebooks on painting technique; and his collected poems.[10] Kung was thus a literatus as well as a loyalist; someone who wrote on painting theory, history, and technique, and who commented on contemporary artists and on collectors such as Chou Liang-kung.[11]

Kung Hsien is known primarily for a generalized and sometimes formulaic mode of landscape, heavily dotted for effects of light and shadow, but often accompanied by supple, strongly shaped linear contours that display his idiosyncratic and somewhat calligraphic brush manner, in the manner of literati painters. His "Serried Mountain Peaks" of 1655 in the Shih-t'ou Shu-wu Collection (Fig. 1) is a very early work, and somewhat atypical in the strong rhythms of the dynamically shaped cliffs and relatively thin surface textures, but still embodies many of his characteristic features. Kung's instructional or theoretical texts embody a related generality of approach, emphasizing quasi-abstract formulae for rendering rocks, tree trunks, or foliage.[12] This is a partial and somewhat misleading image of Kung Hsien's work, of course, since he painted many specific landscapes with particular personal or political associations as well. His "View of Mt. Qixia [Ch'i-hsia]," (Fig. 2) for example, combines a specificity of title and building placement that links it to serial topographical imagery, along with possible Buddhist and loyalist associations that are embedded in the subject matter and in the solemn symmetry and brooding stillness of the presentation.[13] Some of his large, silk

10. See Marc Wilson, *Kung Hsien: Theorist and Technician in Painting* (Kansas City: Nelson Gallery, 1969); Jerome Silbergeld, *Political Symbolism in the Landscape Painting and Poetry of Kung Hsien (c. 1620-1689)* (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1974); William Wu, "Kung Hsien's Style and His Sketchbooks," *Oriental Art* XVI (Spring 1970): 72-81.
11. See for example Kim, *The Life of a Patron*, pp. 167-68.
12. See Wu, "Kung Hsien's Style."
13. See Yun-ch'iu Mei's essay, "Loyalist networks and Buddhist Visual Culture," in Vinograd, ed., *The Southern Metropolis*, pp. 16-17. See also the closely related images of Mt. She and Mt. Ch'ing-liang

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hanging scroll compositions, such as his image of the Yueh-yang Tower, or his multi-panel screen paintings, are topographically and architecturally specific, and are pretty clearly professional products.[14] Nonetheless, the powerful, crowded, geologically structured landscapes of the type represented by the 1655 hanging scroll is most characteristic. Typically, such landscapes are uninhabited, uneventful except in geological or compositional terms, and often hermetic in terms of being closed off from a wider world, with forms that reach toward the top edge of the format and no visible horizon lines.

There is another side to contemporary Nanching painting, represented equally superbly by the ten-leaf "Album of Landscapes" from 1666 by Fan Ch'i, also in the Shih-t'ou Shu-wu collection. Where Kung's landscapes are largely monochromatic, Fan's include significant local and atmospheric color (Fig. 3, 4). Where Kung's buildings are generic and often symbolic, Fan's are specifically structured and particular architectural types (Fig. 4, 5). Where Kung's paintings are typically extensively inscribed, Fan's are, unfortunately for the present discussion, extremely laconic in their accompanying text matter.[15] Since Fan Ch'i's paintings seldom provide their own explanations, part of the purpose of this paper is to try to discern embedded structures of narrative in his work, based on their organization, thematic content, and visual effect. This account will try to suggest what kind of appeal they held for their viewers, and to indicate how they were related to other kinds of visual experiences available to their audiences. Where Kung Hsien's paintings are mostly uneventful, Fan's harbor narratives of travel, sight-seeing, and visual perception. Fan Ch'i in this context provides a point of entry into some broader features of Nanching painting at large, found not only in his work but in paintings by contemporary artists such as Yeh Hsin (act. ca. 1640-1673), Tsou Che (act. ca. 1641-1684), Wu Hung (act. ca. 1651-1683), and Kao Ts'en (act. ca. 1643-1689); conventionally grouped among the "Eight Chin-ling Masters."

We might begin by looking more closely at Fan Ch'i's album in the Shih-t'ou

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reproduced in *Chin-lingpa chia hua-chi*, no. 79, and 80.

14. See Hsiao P'ing, ed., *Kung Hsien ching p'in chi* (Peiching, Jen-min mei-shu ch'u-pan-she, 1997), nos. 17, 18.

15. Fan's "Fishing Pleasures at Willow Village" of 1669 bears an extensive series of inscriptions, although Fan's own inscription is a typically terse signature and date; see *Chin-ling pa-chia hua-chi*, no. 119. The scroll is partially recorded in Hsü Ch'iu, *Ts'u-yüan ts'ung-t'an*, ch. 9. Other accounts of Fan Ch'i's paintings by contemporaries appear in Chi Yung-jen, *Pao-tu shan-fang chi*, ch. 5, and Wang Shih-chen, *Ching hua lu*, ch. 5, 6.

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Shu-wu Collection, as a way of getting more deeply into characteristic structural aspects of Fan Ch'i's approach. Leaf five is perhaps closest in the group to Kung Hsien's manner, built almost entirely of horizontal strokes or *tien* to create a landscape of soft, rounded hills that are darkly textured and shaded, with a correspondingly striking contrast generated by the broad bands of white reserve mist that wipe across the center of the picture.[16] This passage is already an indication of a subtle difference from Kung Hsien's approach: rarely does Kung match this degree of attention to the subtle visual appearance of mist as it comes gradually into visibility, and then turns cottony and thick as it appears here. Below, nestled in groves of trees between the hills and the edge of the water are two clusters of squarish, pink and blue-roofed houses, perhaps fourteen roofs visible in all. As with Kung Hsien's typical manner these show no sign of habitation, but the sheer numbers and variety of buildings signal a potential sociability.

Leaf five is also unusual for Fan Ch'i in its relative closure. The band of mist blocks a potential view beyond or around the far mountain slope; a path in the left foreground suggests a route, but with no real indication of where it leads. Much more commonly, Fan Ch'i's landscapes are fundamentally about travel, either physical travel or offered journeys of sight. In leaf one, a rider and his companion emerge from behind a low slope, moving forward along a zigzag road toward the foreground left (Fig. 6). The journey forward is partially mirrored in a sweeping diagonal road that angles off to the right background, disappearing gradually into a misty border. The green hills of leaf two are the setting for several markers of travel: the destination house by the shore in the foreground set amid willow trees; an arched stone bridge; a diagonal path in the distance and a grove of blossoming trees at the verge of a low slope (Fig. 3). The grassy butte that dominates the left center of the composition promises a further visual journey to the distant hills farther off.

The embedded narratives of travel in Fan Ch'i's paintings often involve river journeys, as in leaf three, where a cluster of sails on the water are framed by a ceremonial gateway, or *p'ai-fang*, perched on a promontory overlooking the river (Fig. 4). Leaf four includes a quieter river journey, as a single boatman navigates around a

16. Here and elsewhere I follow the leaf-number designation given in the Shih-t'ou Shu-wu Collection catalogue volume; see Ts'ai Yi-hsüan, ed., *Yüeh Mu: Chung-kuo wan-ch'i hui-hua* ("Enchanting Images: Late Chinese Painting and Calligraphy from the Shih-t'ou Shu-wu Collection") (Taipei: Shih-t'ou Press, 2001), plate volume, no. 35/5, p. 216.

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rocky islet in the center of the river.[17] The isolation of the scene is tempered by the presence of an impressive octagonal pavilion standing in the water offshore of the islet, that signals a potential sociability.

Two other leaves in this album place houses high on the summits of hills, reached by broken sections of pathways. The houses offer views as their reward for the arduous climbs; in one case, the full moon in the sky is a token of the wider prospects promised by the location of the houses (Fig. 5).

Fan Ch'i's landscapes are not exactly formulaic; indeed, their impact considerably depends on effects of visual specificity and variety of topography. His pictures do follow certain patterns, however. Frequently one side of the composition is dominated or blocked by a hill or cliff, while the other, lower side offers a release into the distance. His paintings embed some narrative of travel or journey, and of distant visual prospect, and there is usually some hint or aspect of sociability.

Personal and Generic Contexts

Beyond the evidence within his paintings we can turn to biographical accounts for some guidance in assessing Fan Ch'i's works, but the record is relatively sparse and unrevealing. Fan was given a brief biography in Chou Liang-kung's *Tu-hua lu*, "Lives of Painters" in Hongnam Kim's annotated translation, which is cited here.[18] We learn that Fan was a Nanching native, and that he was linked closely with his elder brother Fan I, also a painter. The two lived together beside the Hui-kuang temple, in a wooden house with a sparse bamboo fence, where they devoted themselves to painting. In Chou's words, they lived quietly just as if they were immortals. Chou composed a poem for the two, with the aim of making the brothers' lofty natures better known. The poem stresses their reclusive nature, living with their "door closed," and devoting themselves to landscape paintings that could achieve a boundless ambition. The references in the final couplet to "northern mountains and cloudy trees looking lonely and desolate," and "now getting old, you bow every morning to ruined pines," suggests some loyalist sentiments, involving regret for the destruction of invasion and reverence for the

17. See ibid., no. 35/4, p. 215.

18. See Hongnam Kim, *Chou Liang-kung and His "Tu-hua-lu" (Lives of Painters): Patron-critic and Painters in Seventeenth Century China* (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1985), volume II, pp. 146-48.

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remnants of a broken dynasty.[19]

The remainder of Chou Liang-kung's account is given over to a recitation of Fan's generic specialties—landscape, flower, and figure paintings—and to an anecdote concerning the year 1650, when Chou encountered the calligrapher Wang To (1592-1652) while on the way to Beijing and the two viewed some album paintings by Fan Ch'i that Chou had brought along on the journey. Wang To's admiring colophon notes that he didn't know who Fan Ch'i was, but that he recognized in his painting the manners of Chao Meng-fu (1254-1322) and of Chao Ta-nien (active ca. 1070-1100). Wang went on to praise the serene, undisturbed, scholarly aura of the paintings, and their sincerity and clarity. He concluded: "It is like the brush of an old master, not that of a modern school." [20]

As with many such texts, the accounts are as interesting for what they omit or avoid, or for what is covered over by what *is* said, as they are for the positive information they contain. Chou Liang-kung makes Fan and his elder brother into recluse-loyalists, while Wang To turns him into a scholar-painter laden with art historical references to earlier masters. Both accounts have a measure of validity, but fall far short of telling the whole story. The Fan brothers may have lived withdrawn lives, but their residence was hard by the courtesan's district in the Ch'in-huai Canal area; judging by the range and quantity of Fan Ch'i's surviving output at least (since there are few surviving works by Fan I), they seem to have operated as busy professional painters in the city.[21] Chou Liang-kung's mention of carrying Fan's work with him on his travels recalls the way he seems to have operated not just as a collector or art lover but as a promoter of Nanching artists, introducing their work to new audiences and potential purchasers. Nor are art historical references very prominent or explicit in Fan's work, or among those painters with whom he had affinities, or even, comparatively speaking, among Nanching painters in general (outside of Kung Hsien and Wang Kai) in comparison to Sung-chiang or Su-chou artists. Wang To's invocation of Chao Meng-fu and Chao Ta-nien as models for Fan seems far-fetched in some respects, since both were literate painters with aristocratic family connections, from a

19. See Kim, ibid., vol. II, p. 148, note 526.
20. Ibid. pp.146-7.
21. For Fan I's (act. ca. 1658-71) "Purification at the Orchid Pavilion" handscroll, see Wai-kam Ho et al. Ed., *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting: The Collections of the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum, Kansas City, and the Cleveland Museum of Art* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1980), cat no. 218, pp. 287-88.

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social and cultural milieu very distant from that of the Fan brothers. The archaistic and art-historical allusions in the paintings of the two Chaos seem also largely unrelated to Fan Ch'i's mostly embedded, mixed stylistic references, which are generally more about Song monumental or perceptual modes than they are to scholarly, "southern school" genres. The most apt connection may be in straightforwardly stylistic terms, since both Chao Ta-nien and Chao Meng-fu worked in colorful styles related to the blue-and-green manner. Wang To might thus have been referencing Fan Ch'i's occasional use of bright green colors in landscapes or his colorful bird and insect paintings (Fig. 3).[22]

There are occasionally some more explicit narrative themes in Fan's paintings that could support the biographical persona of a recluse or immortal. Fan's surviving hanging scroll compositions include an image of the "Peach Blossom Spring" with its associations of escape from the world of politics and history (fig. 7)[23]. An album leaf in the Beijing Palace Museum shows two scholar-recluses in conversation, one of whom is garbed in a grass cape and leans on a natural stone table within a grotto-like thatched shelter.[24] In various ways each of these subjects suggests an interest in, or at least a market for, images of reclusion, escape, or transcendence.

Fan Ch'i may have cultivated (or had cultivated for him by patrons and promoters such as Chou Liang-kung) an image as a high minded recluse, but the majority of his surviving paintings are the sort that could have appealed to a diverse urban marketplace. He worked in all formats, including large complex hanging scrolls full of incident and narrative detail such as "Wind and Rain by the Riverbank" of 1676 (Fig. 8). Anglers fish from boats moored in the foreground; a drover struggles with a recalcitrant donkey on a three-arched stone-faced bridge just above. More mounted travelers appear on a farther path. Behind is a walled estate with courtyards, storied buildings on stone foundations, and huge eroded garden rocks spilling out above an inner courtyard. Beyond is a crowded boat harbor, with waves roiled by the unsettled weather. A two-masted junk with covered cabins and a low skiff are the only two vessels to brave the waves, but a whole forest of masts on either shore suggest a busy commerce for the town on the far shore.

22. See *Chin-ling pa-chia hua-chi,* nos. 119, 139, 141, 143, 145, 151, 158..
23. See ibid., no. 126.
24. See Shan Kuo-ch'iang, ed., *Chin-ling chu-chia hui-hua: Ku-kung po-wu-yüan ts'ang wen-wu chen-p'in ch'üan-chi* ("The Complete Collection of Treasures of the Palace Museum: Paintings of the Jinling Region:") (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1997), no. 59, pp. 156-7.

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The “Wind and Rain” hanging scroll has something of the quality of a set-piece, with conventional episodes such as the balky pack animals that have sources as far back as the Song dynasty, combined with local elements such as the stone-faced bridge and the images of riverine commerce that should have been familiar to a lifelong Nanching resident. Fan Ch’i’s handscrolls were often among his most specific subjects, and his undated “Scenic Beauties of Chin-ling” (Fig. 9) has the appearance almost of direct notation. It is a simply drawn riverscape, framed by a triple-arched stone-faced bridge at the opening passage and by a slight bend in the river leading to some framing hills at the close. In between, the river stretches horizontally in almost exact parallel to the handscroll format; compositional interest and variety is sacrificed in favor of legibility. The river banks are densely lined on each side by houses interspersed among green willow trees; several on the far shore are built on pilings in the water, and two have vermilion-painted balustrades. The boats on the river seem to be on pleasure excursions, with parties of men in conversation. The scene is observed by several onlookers, shown looking over the bridge railings at the opening of the scroll, or peering over a streetside railing at the right foreground. The scroll is about leisure pastimes and social visibility; perhaps even representing Fan’s neighborhood of the Ch’in-huai pleasure district along that waterway.

This is one of the few paintings by Fan Ch’i that explicitly evokes the experience of urban life, though he painted many images that include specific built structures; city walls, gates, ceremonial buildings, and residences. These are sometimes substantial destinations, as in a leaf from an undated six-leaf album in the Anhui Provincial Museum where clusters of rooftops are visible beyond the imposing city wall and tall arched gateway, with an extra-mural zone of riverside boats, a multi-arched bridge, and houses on the viewer’s side of the wall (Fig. 11). In this case, the city and mountains beyond are shrouded in heavy fog, lending it, despite all the vivid and circumstantial detail of its rendering and the possibility of a specific reference, something of the quality of a dream or memory. A handscroll painting from 1687 called “The Herdboy Points to the Apricot Blossom Village” (Fig. 12) is set just outside a crenellated city wall, and offers an intimate view of a zone of houses, fields, and walled gardens. Two youths practice archery in the foreground and a herdboy converses with two figures in the middle distance; the tone is suburban and pastoral, but with the contrasting presence of the city signaled by the nearby wall.

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Perceptual and Historical Distancings

While some of Fan Ch'i's paintings offer an involving narrative for the viewer, it is much more characteristic for his images to be distanced, in both visual and emotional terms. Most common is a high, straight-on viewpoint of a scene that, even if it extends to the foreground, does not offer an easy invitation to entry. Most often the figures, buildings and boats are small in scale and remote in impact. It might indeed have been this general distancing effect more than any particular quality of subject matter or style that accounted for the tone of Chou Liang-kung's characterization of the Fan brothers in terms appropriate for recluse painters of remote mountainscapes, rather than the architecturally-defined urban outskirts and travelscapes that are Fan Ch'i's predominant concern.

That quality of distancing is strikingly exemplified in an eight-leaf "Landscape" album from the Ch'ing-tao Museum. In the first two leaves the scale and focal points are set by architectural elements: a village of a twenty or so buildings overlooked by a pagoda; a crenellated city wall leading to a bluff-top building (Fig. 14)[25]. The high buildings offer focal points for views to markers of distance which are themselves transitional objects: sails above a low spit of land; trackers hauling a two-masted boat upstream along the misty far shore. The distancing effect here is not solely a matter of composition and subject matter, but attaches also to the quality of vision and sight that informs these pictures. Above all, Fan Ch'i is notable for his crispness of representation, sure handling of scale, and clear definition of spatial and structural relationships whether of land forms or built objects. The effect is of a cool, detached examination and analysis of relationships between the human, built, and natural environments. Leaf four of the Ch'ing-tao album shows a water gate flanked by a massive crenellated wall and gate on one side and a cluster of a couple of dozen residences on the other (Fig. 17)[26]. Boat traffic, travel, and commerce are represented by the boats moored in the right foreground and an echoing forest of masts in the distance.

What were the sources, or the correlates, of this distancing and detachment? There was clearly some impact of Song dynasty, even specifically Northern Song visuality at work, as exemplified by an album in Anhui Provincial Museum, where the first leaf is dominated by tall cliffs surmounted by shrubby foliage in a fairly explicit,

25. See *Chin-ling pa-chia hua-chi,* no. 149.
26. See ibid., no.152.

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though unacknowledged, reference to the Fan K'uan manner (Fig. 20)[27]. Other leaves in this album are structured around similar rectilinear cliffs; in the case of leaf four, these are further defined by a reticulate network of highlights on the prominent surfaces and a corresponding pattern of concentrated shadow that seems to embody a reference to European light-and-shadow modeling systems (Fig. 21).

Both of these sources, Northern Song and European, can convey qualities of objective analysis and the experience of vision, but it would be misleading to imply that these were carried along passively through stylistic reference. These qualities were instead matters of deliberate choice on Fan Ch'i's part, who found visual and stylistic sources that were congenial to his own concerns and inclinations. Fan Ch'i seems almost never to have claimed or pointed explicitly to his sources. Even that silence, however, represents a revealing choice, to maintain a distance from and avoid participating in the discourses of art historical reference and *fang* imitation. Monumentality was one of his prime concerns in the Anhui Museum album, for its distancing effects and congeniality to a prevailing taste in the early Ch'ing Nanching art world. Effects of light were even more to the point of this work, not so much the systematic modeling light of leaf four (Fig. 21), but an atmospheric light that conveys effects of times of day and of particularized sight.

Place-Making

The issue of specificity is an interesting one for Fan Ch'i and for others of his contemporaries. The variety and particularity of architectural structure and setting present in his paintings suggest that these might be "real," that is, specific and identifiable places, but the frequent lack of titles or inscriptional evidence makes that hard to ascertain. This was not a simple matter of lack of information or labeling, because places were to considerable extent constituted by texts as much as by visual recording. It should be useful to place Fan Ch'i's pictorial practices within a better documented context of place-pictures, that offers a sense of the pre-existing forms and formulas by which place was imaged and received in seventeenth-century Nanching. I refer particularly to Chu Chih-fan's *Chin-ling t'u-yung*; a 1623 compilation of some forty famous sights and places in the vicinity of the southern capital.[28] Each woodblock

27. Ibid., no. 175.

28. The illustrations reproduced here are from a 1623 edition in the National Central Library, Taipei, with traditional pagination. I have also consulted an edition from the University of California, Berkeley

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print image is accompanied by a following page of introductory, historical, or explanatory text, along with a regulated-verse poem that further endowed each scene with a literary aura. The accompanying text for the scene titled "Asking About Wine at the Apricot Village" (Fig. 13) is representative:

"In the west of the Chiang-ning District jurisdiction, between the Lower Floating and Upper Floating Bridges, close by the corner of the city wall and contiguous with the Phoenix Terrace, an Apricot Grove was established in old times. In springtime there were many sojourners, and the gardeners detested their bustling about and trampling, climbing, breaking off and felling trees for fuel. In the end only one of a hundred trees survived. [Now] the herd-boys pleasantly reply and point out the village taverns. In recent years fragrant gardens have spread out here and there as numerous as pieces on a chess board, with their flourishing and declining reaching that of the ancient traces, without reaching an end." [29]

The print illustration shows the very scene that Fan Ch'i later transformed into his handscroll composition of 1686 (Fig. 12), where the key identifying details are arrayed horizontally: a crenellated city wall, walled garden compounds, blossoming trees, a herd-boy encountering inquiring travelers outside the village, and a scene of archery practice in the near foreground. Fan's inscription is untitled, including only a date and simple dedication, but the textual account of the site from the *Chin-ling t'u-yung* most likely would have carried over to the reception of his painting. The associations of the text account are to a site of leisure and recreation, to environmental despoliation from urban over-use, and to the cycles of decline and recovery associated with urban economies and demographics.

The textual or literary side of this place-making was primary in a direct sense. Chu Chih-fan's preface to the *Chin-ling t'u-yung* makes it clear that the literary "odes" came first, with the artist Lu Shou-po entrusted to visit the forty sites included in the compilation and compose appropriate pictorial accompaniments to them.[30] Identifying textual labels also appear prominently in many of the prints, especially those containing architectural motifs. Fan Ch'i's paintings of this sort, directly dependent on the print

Libraries with consecutive pagination in Arabic numerals, which I sometimes cite for the sake of clarity.

29. See Chu Chih-fan, *Chin-ling t'u-yung*, p. 14b.

30. See ibid. (UC Berkeley edition), pp. 2-3. Lu Shou-po is otherwise unknown outside of this context; see Yu Chien-hua ed., *Chung-kuo mei-shu-chia jen-ming ts'u-tien* (Shanghai: Shanghai jen-min mei-shu ch'u-pan-she, 1981), p. 981.

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designs, mostly dispense with the labeling texts, unlike, for example, his contemporary Tsou Che, who uses the formulaic identifying title "Clearing Snow at the Stone City Wall" in a hanging scroll composition directly related to the print illustration or another similar source (Fig. 18, 19)[31]. For Fan Ch'i, the pictorial elements become primary semiotic markers of identity, maintaining their function even through the deformations involved with adaptation to a different format.

The "Scenic Beauties of Chin-ling" handscroll (Fig. 9), while not self-titled, contains enough architectural specificity to convey an identification, although without the precise kind of match found in the "Apricot Village" painting and print. The triple-arched, stone-faced bridge at the opening of the scroll is one such distinctive element, along with the pleasure boats on the water and vermilion-balustraded pavilions built out over the water on pilings. The references here seem to be to the "Traveling by Boat at Ch'ing-hsi" scene in the *Chin-ling t'u-yung* compilation (Fig. 10), despite the absence of the distinctive sharply angled bends in the stream in Fan Ch'i's painting and a general reorientation from bird's-eye view to a straight-on, slightly elevated viewpoint. Both print and painting include a triple arched bridge over the channel and a stone-balustraded promenade beside it, each carrying onlookers. In both versions there are canopied boats and buildings constructed out over the water on pilings, interspersed among willow trees. The accompanying *Chin-ling t'u-yung* text notes the nine bends in the Ch'ing-hsi channel and its linkage with the Ch'in-huai Canal and continues: "In the Southern Dynasties period great families mostly dwelt there. Nowadays pavilions, private dwellings, and teahouses are squeezed together in abundance along the banks. In summer and autumn Su-chou boats carry wine, with singing and blowing horns and clamorous noise, as if the manner of the Six Dynasties was as before and hadn't changed."[32] The text adds a note of historical perspective and nostalgia to the print illustration's effect of urban activity; Fan Ch'i's painting, in turn, may in its quieter presentation have conveyed a further nostalgia for the lost days of the late Ming.

Such easily recognizable sites constitute one category of imagery within Fan Ch'i's work, and form one type of direct relationship with pre-existing imagery such as the *Chin-ling t'u-yung* prints.[33] A second category involves images that convey the

31. See *Chin-ling pa-chia*, pl. 224; cf. *Chin-ling t'u-yung*, pp. 2a-b.
32. *Chin-ling t'u-yung*, p. 21b.
33. An album of paintings attributed to Fan Ch'i's Nanching-based contemporary Kao Ts'en in the University of Michigan Museum of Art depicting all forty sites found in the *Chin-ling t'u-yung*, though an unreliable attribution that dates from later in the Ch'ing period, may represent a more widespread

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appearance of site-specificity through the use of forms and compositional structures shared with or borrowed from the vocabulary of the *Chin-ling t'u-yung* place pictures, but without either the textual labeling or the clear visual correspondences that would permit clear identifications. For the most part, designs like those of the *Chin-ling t'u-yung* probably functioned as a widely disseminated structural vocabulary of generic sites, such as mountain temples; river vistas, prospects, urban scenes, and routes. Fan Ch'i and his contemporaries could have evoked these generic structures, and even some of their associated historical, literary, and cultural lore, without being tied to the specifics of place. Place-making then became a more expansive and even poetic process, enriched by visual-perceptual qualities. In Fan Ch'i's work these references are usually reduced and strongly focused in comparison to the busy urban and suburban environs of the late Ming prints, thus drawing on a lore of urban sites while evoking, perhaps, an historically situated sense of diminishment and loss.

An example is leaf four from the Ch'ing-tao Museum album (Fig. 17), where the high crenellated wall enclosure and tall arched gateway with boats moored nearby are very reminiscent of the iconography of the Stone City Wall from the *Chin-ling t'u-yung* print illustration (Fig. 18), but without the distinctive rocky outcrop incorporated into the wall or the nearby bridge supported by tall pylons that are prominent in the print and such painted versions of the subject as Tsou Che's hanging scroll in the Shanghai Museum (Fig. 19)[34]. Leaf two of the Ch'ing-tao Museum album (Fig. 14) is reminiscent of the "Autumn Moon at Phoenix Terrace" image (Fig. 15) from the *Chin-ling t'u-yung* scenes, with an angled slope jutting up above the crenellated wall to offer views of the river and far shore beyond. Neither the topography nor the surroundings are very close to the print image, however, and Fan Ch'i's paintings here and elsewhere in the album are probably best understood as a semiotic complex, where borrowed or evocative motifs serve as markers of the concept of locality rather than as signs of specific sites. They might carry along with them some of the associational matter found in the print compilation texts, or more general implications of "historically resonant viewing site" (Fig. 14), or "urban enclosure" (Fig. 11). Other, more general, signifiers could link up with these to create small embedded narratives of sightseeing, historical or personal reminiscence, travel, commerce, and residence for the viewers of the paintings. Many of these approaches were shared by Fan Ch'i's contemporaries, though typically they

pictorial practice in early Ch'ing Nanching.

34. See *Chin-ling pa-chia hua-chi*, nos. 152 and 224 for Fan Ch'i's Ch'ing-tao Museum album leaf and Tsou Che's hanging scroll version of the subject, and *Chin-ling t'u-yung*, pp. 2a-b for the print image.

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might add explicit illustrative viewing figures as in the prints, where Fan Ch'i might include only an empty building as a marker of a viewing position and as a focal point for a viewer's sight (Fig. 14, 15, 16).

Such images harbor qualities not only of site-specificity but also of sight-specificity. They embody the look of particular visual experiences, which take on both perceptual and semiotic functions. That is to say, such images contain to begin with signifiers of particular sites, or of site-specificity, and further markers of narratives of sight-seeing and travel. While in the *Chin-ling t'u-yung* prints most of the semiotic work is conveyed in schematic design and textual form, with coded markers of buildings, landforms, routes, histories, and views, Fan Ch'i's paintings add a perceptual layer related to the look *from* a site as well as the look *of* a site. The specific qualities of that sight—typically elevated, still, distanced and detached as noted above—conveys a further message of distancing even without atextual accompaniment: historical distance, emotional distance, and possessive distance on the part of the viewer are signaled, even at the point of engagement with the scene.

Fan Ch'i was generally silent on matters that might bear on interpretation and significance, but a large landscape leaf surviving from a 1676 album suggests the potential semiotic and narrative richness of Fan's paintings even at his most schematic: stands of trees in the foreground, a figure walking with a staff across a footbridge, an impressive ceremonial-looking building beyond the ridge, and a boat on the distant river (Fig. 22). This kind of scheme is a very representative compositional formula for Fan Ch'i, with strong diagonal movement and counter movements that lend an air of dynamic energy and even a certain spatial drama to a scene that is, in the end, made up of quite placid elements. It is also semiotically representative, with the basic components of Fan Ch'i's vocabulary represented, beginning with the human traveler. Second, there is an architectural focal point for sight, which is both perceptual and, most likely, historical, or memorial—some embodiment of past social or cultural function, as well as current social use. Third is the natural, in the form of stands of mostly bare trees that may be stand-ins for human social interactions, as well as topographical features that can embody dramas of hiding and disclosure, or, like the distinctively jutting bluff, convey associations of locality. Finally there are transitional evocations of a wider world: a boat on the river that evokes places unseen and unrepresented in the picture proper.

One can construct, or project, as a contemporary viewer might have done, simple narratives out of combinations of this basic group of motifs and themes. For example, the groves of dramatically silhouetted standing trees could evoke the mobility or

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suffering of loyalists. The strolling figure lost in memory or thought making his way toward the imposing building on the shore, is perhaps traveling toward a site of former association or political life from which the view of the sails on the river might evoke thoughts of distant, parted companions. It is not only the specific motifs that can contribute to this kind of projected narrative, but also the quality of dramatic reversals in the composition, and even the effect of precise vision and observations; the treatment seems to alert its viewers that this is a scene worth noting, worth paying attention to in every detail of from and interrelationship. Certainly there are qualities of portentous stillness, and evocations of significance and of impending or past events that hang over many of Fan Ch'i's uncannily still and precisely observed scenes.

A final mode of relationship to preexisting pictorial motifs in Fan Ch'i's career is exemplified, somewhat unexpectedly, in the *Landscape* handscroll dated in accordance with 1645 from the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco (Fig. 23). Unexpected because this among all of Fan Ch'i's works seems at first viewing to be the most inventive and even visionary, and has been discussed within a discursive context of fantasy and mysteriousness.[35] The landscape forms often seem unmoored from stable coordinates, and ribbons of mist that wipe across the mountains have a further dissolving, destabilizing effect. Yet many of the passages have a haunting familiarity and are in fact brilliantly synthesized and adapted set-passages from the *Chin-ling t'u-yung* repertory, in a kind of inspired pastiche. This is especially clear at the end of the handscroll (Fig. 23, .sections f-g) where the arched-over cavern seems a close reference to the "Tiger Grotto;" (Fig, 24) and the climactic soaring, overhanging cliff an adaptation of the "Swallow Cliff" (Fig. 25). Elsewhere, and less directly, the complex angular and jutting cliffs at the opening of Fan Ch'i's handscroll (Fig. 23, section a) are structurally reminiscent of the Chia-lo Peak at the Bodhidharma Grotto and of Lion Mountain (Fig. 26), and a long, upward-angled ridge midway through the scroll (Fig. 23, section f) recalls the "Phoenix Terrace" (Fig. 15).[36] Other sections recall, or rather foreshadow, vistas and evocations of river travel and commerce from elsewhere in Fan Ch'i's work. Thus what seemed at first viewthe most inventive and original of Fan Ch'i's works was paradoxically in important ways synthetic and derivative. Part of that dependence extends to the overall treatment of the landscape, in terms that seem indebted to the earlier generation Nanching painter Wu Pin, with strongly stippled surface textures and

35. See James Cahill, *Fantastics and Eccentrics in Chinese Painting*, p. 63.
36. For images of the Chia-lo Peak and the Bodhidharma Grotto, see *Chin-ling t'u-yung*, p. 53.

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adept use of reserve.[37] It may seem incongruous to call such an early work synthetic, but this does suggest the ways in which Fan Ch'i's art, even at its most adventurous and unrevealing in terms of reference of meaning, can be linked to the larger, diverse contexts of Nanching pictorial culture: famous sites, local pictorial traditions, themes of sight and travel. Fan Ch'i's art is seldom art historical in the customary sense, but it is deeply imbued with a distinctive local visual culture.

Nonetheless, the disruptive intensity with which such familiar elements were treated and transformed may have been due to factors very much of the moment. The *Landscape* handscroll was, after all, painted in 1645, the very year when Manchu forces conquered of the city of Nanching. Where the earlier *Chin-ling t'u-yung* images emphasized a schematic legibility of *site*, Fan Ch'i's *Landscape* handscroll of 1645 insistently conveys qualities of unpredictable *sight*. The many episodes of strongly focused highlight and shadow, metamorphic rock forms, and use of reserve mist shapes as positive design elements may embody references to European pictoriality and to the late Ming landscape of fantasy, but first and foremost they represent a determined call away from formulaic recognition to processes of engaged sight. Rather than inculcating the viewer with a register of landscape itineraries, Fan Ch'i positioned himself, and the viewers of his scroll, as witnesses to a landscape event, where the places of late Ming Nanching were re-made for a new era.

Author's Note: The author wishes to express his sincere thanks to Mr. Ch'en Chi-te and Ms. Huang Ssu-en, organizers of the exhibition and associated symposium for which this invited paper was first prepared, and for their further facilitation of this published version. Deepest thanks also to Ms. Ma Meng-ching of the National Palace Museum staff, for her kind assistance in multiple research matters, including translations and locating illustrations.

（責任編輯：陳韻如）

37. See Cahill, *Fantastics*, p. 63.

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Fig.1. Kung Hsien (1618-1689). Lieh-yen tsuan-feng (Serried Mountain Peaks), dated 1655. Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 305.5 x 87.7 cm. Shih-t'ou Shu-wu Collection, Taipei.

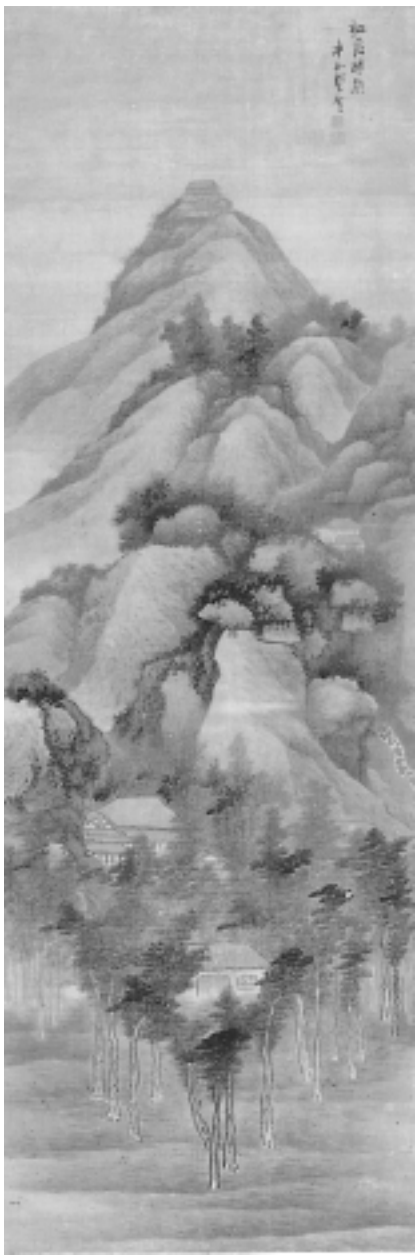


Fig.2. Kung Hsien (Gong Xian, 1618-1689). *View of Mt. Ch'i-hsia [Qixia]*. Hanging scroll, ink on silk. 153.7 cm x 51.8 cm. Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, Gift of Friends of the De Young Museum (B69D54).

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Fig.3. Fan Ch'i (1616-after 1694). Leaf 2, from *Ten-Leaf Album of Landscapes*, dated 1666. Album leaf, ink and colors on silk. Each leaf 22.1 x 28.2 cm. Shih-t'ou Shu-wu Collection, Taipei

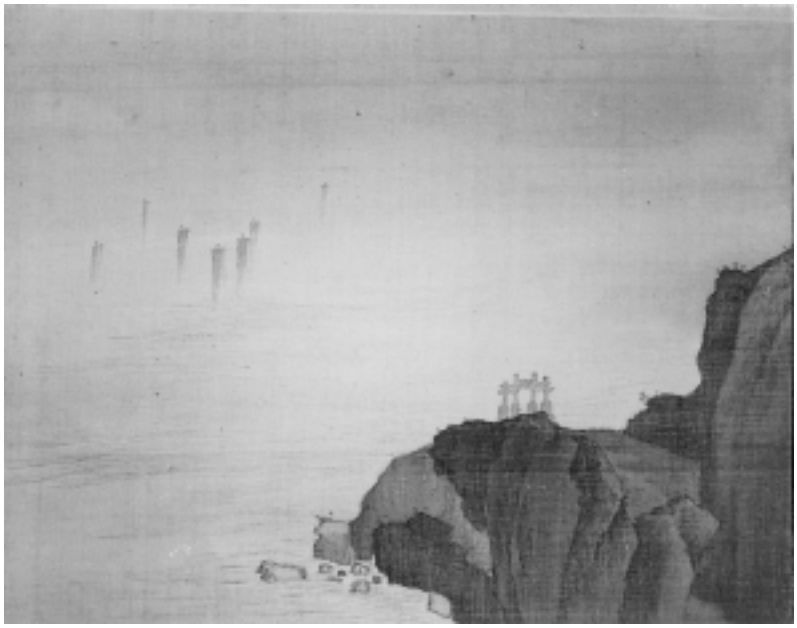


Fig.4. Fan Ch'i (1616-after 1694). Leaf 3, from *Ten-Leaf Album of Landscapes*, dated 1666. Album leaf, ink and colors on silk, 22.1 x 28.2 cm. Shih-t'ou Shu-wu Collection, Taipei

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Fig.5. Fan Ch'i (1616-after 1694). Leaf 7, from *Ten-Leaf Album of Landscapes*, dated 1666. Album leaf, ink and colors on silk., 22.1 x 28. 2 cm. Shih-t'ou Shu-wu Collection, Taipei



Fig.6. Fan Ch'i (1616-after 1694). Leaf 1, from *Ten-Leaf Album of Landscapes*, dated 1666. Album leaf, ink and colors on silk, 22. 1 x 28.2 cm. Shih-t'ou Shu-wu Collection, Taipei

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Fig.7. Fan Ch'i (1616-after 1694). *Peach Blossom Spring*, dated 1689. Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 94 x 47.4 cm. Liaoning Provincial Museum.



Fig.8. Fan Ch'i (1616-after 1694). *Wind and Rain at the River Bank*, dated 1676. Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 174.1 cm. X 99.2 cm. Shanghai Museum.

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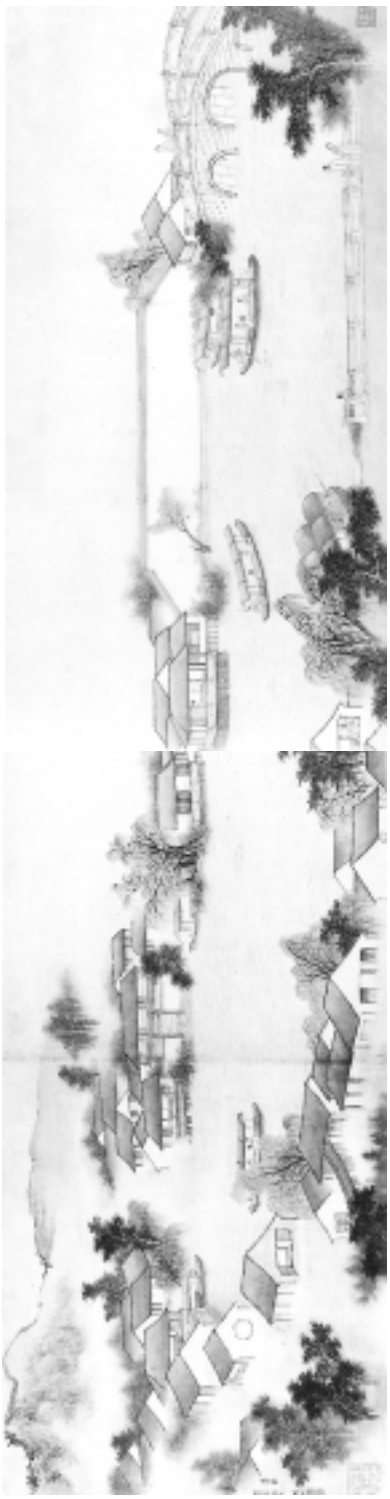


Fig.9. Fan Ch'i (1616-after 1694). *Scenic Beauties of Chin-ling*. Handscroll, ink and color on paper, 69 x 30.5 cm. Nanching Museum.

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Fig.10. Chu Chih-fan, ed., Lu Shou-po designer. *Traveling by Boat a Ch'ing-hsi*, from *Chin-ling t'u-yung*. 1623. Printed book National Central Library, Taipei (microfilm facsimile).

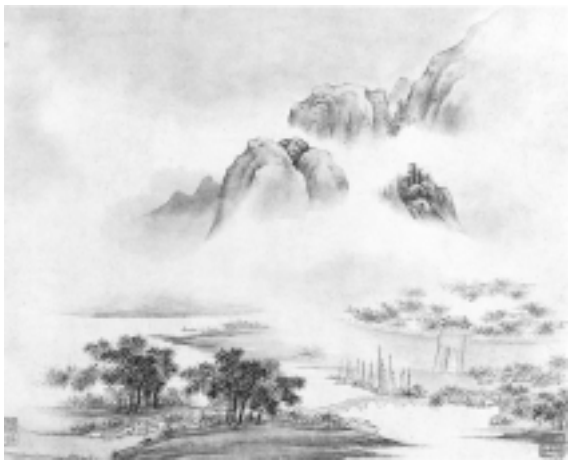


Fig.11. Fan Ch'i (1616-after 1694). *Landscape with City Wall*, from *Six-leaf Album of Landscapes*. Album leaf, ink and color on paper, 29 x 23.5 cm. Anhui Provincial Museum.



Fig.12. Fan Ch'i (1616-after 1694). *The Herd-Boy Points to the Apricot Blossom Village*, dated 1687. Handscroll, ink and color on paper, 121 x 30.7 cm. Nanching Museum.

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Fig.13. Chu Chih-fan, ed., Lu Shou-po designer. *Asking about Wine at the Apricot Village*, from *Chin-ling t'u-yung*. 1623. Printed book. National Central Library, Taipei (microfilm facsimile).



Fig.14. Fan Ch'i (1616-after 1694). *Landscape with Boat and Trackers*, from *Eight-leaf Album of Landscapes*. Album leaf, ink and color on silk, 19.9 x 17.3 cm. Ch'ing-tao City Museum.



Fig.15. Chu Chih-fan, ed., Lu Shou-po, designer. *Autumn Moon at the Phoenix Terrace*, from *Chin-ling t'u-yung*. 1623. Printed book. National Central Library, Taipei (microfilm facsimile).

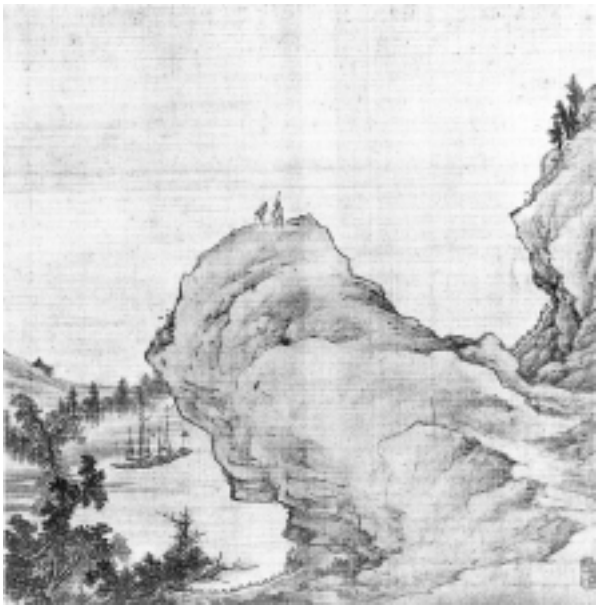


Fig.16. Tsou Che (act. ca. 1641-1684). *Figures Standing on a Bluff Top*, from *Ten-leaf Album of Landscapes*. Album leaf, ink and color on silk, 26 x 26 cm. Nanching City Museum.

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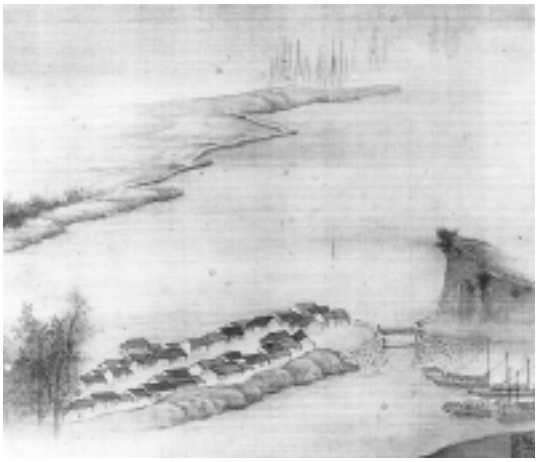


Fig.17. Fan Ch'i (1616-after 1694). *Landscape with Water Gate and Boats*, from *Eight-leaf Album of Landscapes*. Album leaf, ink and color on silk, 19.9 x 17.3 cm. Ch'ing-tao City Museum



Fig.18. Chu Chih-fan, ed., Lu Shou-po, designer. *Clearing Snow at the Stone City Wall*, from *Chin-ling t'u-yung*. 1623. Printed book. National Central Library, Taipei (microfilm facsimile).

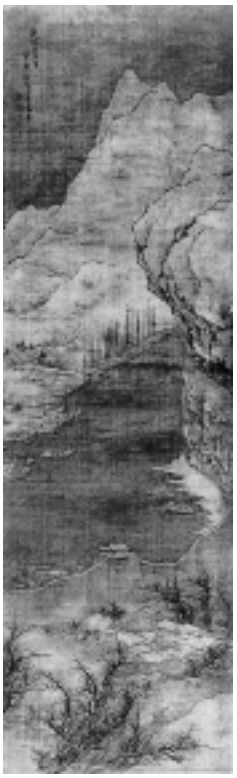


Fig.19. Tsou Che (act. ca. 1641-1684). *Clearing Snow at the Stone City Wall*. Hanging scroll, ink on silk, 167.5 x 51. cm. Shanghai Museum.

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Fig.20. Fan Ch'i (1616-after 1694). *Landscape with Tall Cliffs,* from *Six-leaf Album of Landscapes*. Album leaf, ink and color on paper, 29 x 23.5 cm. Anhui Provincial Museum.

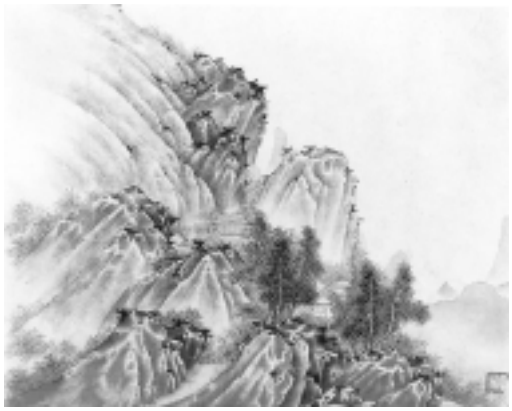


Fig.21. Fan Ch'i (1616-after 1694). *Landscape with Bluffs,* from *Six-leaf Album of Landscapes*. Album leaf, ink and color on paper, 29 x 23.5 cm. Anhui Provincial Museum.



Fig.22. Fan Ch'i (1616-after 1694). *Landscape with Figure*, dated 1676. Album leaf, Ink and color on silk, 27.3 x 24.8 cm. Tianjin Municipal Fine Arts Museum.

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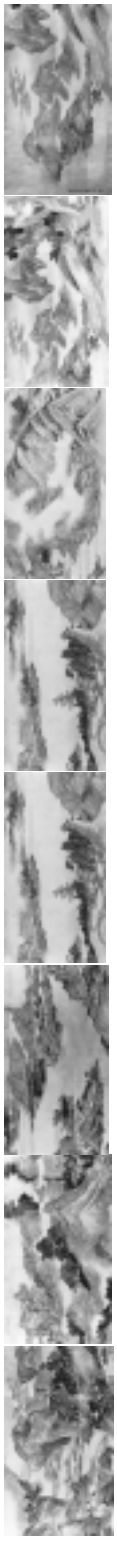


Fig.23. Fan Ch'i (Fan Qi, 1616-after 1694). *Landscape*, dated 1645. Handscroll, Ink and colors on paper, 31.1 x 410.2 cm. Asian Art Museum of San Francisco. The Avery Brundage Collection (B66D19).

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Fig.24. Chu Chih-fan, ed., Lu Shou-po, designer. *Seeking Seclusion at Tiger Grotto*, from *Chin-ling t'u-yung*. 1623. Printed book. National Central Library, Taipei (microfilm facsimile).



Fig.25. Chu Chih-fan, ed., Lu Shou-po, designer *Dawn View at Swallow Cliff*, from *Chin-ling t'u-yung*. 1623. Printed book National Central Library, Taipei (microfilm facsimile).



Fig.26. Chu Chih-fan, ed., Lu Shou-po, designer. *Grand View at Lion Peak*, from *Chin-ling t'u-yung*. 1623. Printed book. National Central Library, Taipei (microfilm facsimile).

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